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SUBJECT: ZAGREB WEEKLY ACTIVITY REPORT - MAY 21, 2008

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11. (U)USAID/CROATIA CELEBRATES 15 YEARS OF PARTNERSHIP:
More than 450 people from all over Croatia attended a closing ceremony celebrating Croatia's graduation from SEED assistance held in Zagreb on May 15. Many of the attendees traveled from cities throughout Croatia where USAID has worked, and included representatives from USAID's partners both within government institutions, such as the judiciary and the National Competitiveness Council, as well as from civil society, including both civic activists and a diverse range of entrepreneurs. Speakers at the event, including Ambassador Bradtke, USAID Assistant Administrator for Europe and Eurasia Doug Menarchik, and GoC Vice Prime Minister Jadrank Kosor, highlighted the transformation that Croatia has experienced over the past 15 years and the role \$320 million in USAID-administered programs have played in the transformation. Ambassador Bradtke also emphasized that the U.S.-Croatia partnership will continue, even as USAID programs conclude a Mission administered \$320 million of that assistance. Prior to the ceremony, Mr. Menarchik and Amb. Bradtke visited the Microsoft Business Technology Center, a public private partnership in Varazdin, where he met with small business, commercial software developers, the head of the center and Microsoft Croatia. Also, at a lunch hosted by the American Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Menarchik delivered remarks on public private partnerships and the need for Corporate Social Responsibility. (RLatorraca)

12. (U) VISA WAIVER WORKING GROUP MOVES FORWARD:
The GoC-Embassy Zagreb bilateral Visa Waiver Program (VWP) Working Group held its second meeting on May 16. Assistant Foreign Minister Ivica Tomic reiterated the GoC's commitment from the highest levels to cooperate on this issue, expressing hope that the supportive statements of President Bush on the issue of waiver during his April visit to Zagreb were a positive first step. Croatian representatives presented their responses to an Embassy-prepared list of areas that the GoC needed to address as it works toward qualification for visa waiver. Embassy participants stressed in particular that progress would be needed on the sharing of lost and stolen passport (LASP) data and toward issuance of an "e-passport" (i.e. biometric passport with an integrated data chip), before Croatia could be considered for inclusion as a potential "roadmap" country. The GoC indicated its readiness to exchange diplomatic notes to allow sharing of LASP data and took a draft text for consideration. Regarding the e-passport, the GoC took note of the fact that the key target is actual commencement of issuance of such passports, not merely the adoption of the legislation or regulations related to such documents. The GoC representatives acknowledged they do not at present even have a formal target date for issuing such passports, but that even the notional current timeline of the latter half of 2009 would mean a long period before Croatia could even potentially be eligible for

VWP. GoC officials said the government might re-examine its timeline to see if acceleration were possible. (RElvikis)

13. (U) CROATIA CONTINUES TO EXPAND INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPING ACTIVITIES:

On May 15, the first two military officers that will be part of Croatia's contribution to the UN peacekeeping operation in the Golan Heights departed for the Middle East. In June, they will be followed by the rest of the 95-strong Croatian contingent that will be replacing a Slovak detachment in the mission. On May 19, Croatia's National Defense Council agreed to an additional peacekeeping deployment of 15 Croatian servicemen to join the EU peacekeeping mission in Chad in late September or early October, 2008. (RHoltzapple)

14. (U) RIJEKA AND TACOMA INITIATE "CITY TWINNING" ACTIVITIES:

From May 12 to 16, a delegation from the city of Tacoma, Washington, visited the Croatian city of Rijeka to initiate a "twinning" program in which the two major port cities will share experiences on, inter alia, converting former industrial waterfronts into public spaces, methods to promote greater citizen participation in municipal government, integrating university activities into and the planning of showcase events and festivals. The visit was among one of the very last project activities of USAID/Croatia, and should help initiate a sustained relationship drawing on the municipalities own resources. At the conclusion of their visit, the visitors from Washington state invited the city leadership from Rijeka to come for an official visit to Tacoma this summer. (RHoltzapple)

15. (U) CROATIAN GOVERNMENT DONATES 200,000 EUROS TO CHINESE EARTHQUAKE VICTIMS:

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The Government of Croatia decided on May 15 to provide approximately 1.5 million kuna (approx. \$320,000) in humanitarian aid for the victims of the devastating earthquake in China. The aid will be sent to China via the Croatian Red Cross, which has already begun to raise aid for the victims according to the Hina news agency. Following the GoC's similar donation earlier in the month (reftel) to Burmese cyclone victims, Croatia is gradually establishing itself as a regular, if small-scale, donor of international assistance. (PMcCabe)
Bradtke